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Having been away from the garden for the first two weeks of June, it is of course obvious that it is going to go through a lot of changes. The June gap is coming, if not already here. As the garden has gone through its transition through all the seasonal planting we had put in place, it has become a little “noisy”, in terms of its visual aesthetic. Try to avoid the June gap and you’ll get a July gap. Try to fill this and you’ll get an August gap and this can be even harder to fill than either of the former gaps as there isn’t a decent portion of the growing season remaining to allow those plants to establish, knit up and flower well. If there has to be a gap, then taking it earlier may be of preference. The June gap or any gap for that matter can be avoided by the perfect timing of annuals to be stitched through the borders. They could potentially hold the fort whilst the other plants around them are finishing or getting started. There is of course the difficulty of the seasonal weather and as it becomes more and more unpredictable, so does the execution reliability. To tackle these areas we have been hitting some of the smaller bedding pockets, the ones that are the worst first and then we gradually and will continue to move forward. If we were to wait then all those changeovers would have come at once and the garden would have suffered significantly. Again, our hands can be forced, depending on the weather as to which areas are going over sooner, be it wind, flowering, seed ripening, growth and so forth. Chip off the worst, and then pick up the remaining pieces. June has been incredibly interesting because of this, as we try to save the crash. Daily assessments of the garden and plantings are being made with an eye on the stock we have growing down in the nursery and trying to balance the opening of the spaces along with movement of the stock. Can it hold? Will it hold? Which combinations do we want and where? It is key for us to think about those larger bedding areas, such as the Solar Garden to the front of the house. This is our largest bedding area, currently occupied by a vibrant show of *Antirrhinums*. When this is done though, we want to make sure that we have our first choice of plants to take their place, so as to give the “wow factor” as the visitors come round that corner.

One of the areas that Will Larson and I worked on was on the Long Boarder. Meanwhile all the other students and staff tackled other pockets across the Long Boarder. We took ours in two hits, about two weeks apart. The reason being, that we were conscious of plants in the display that were still singing and having a good time, predominantly poppies. Fergus has really taught me to appreciate each moment and view them separately from the setting they are in. Asking questions such as: What will happen if we leave it? The colour is still strong, can it hold? It’s going over, but gracefully, imagine the view if you took it out, would it be better or worse? It would of course be a lot easier to do these changeovers in one sweep, clearing all the material you know is going to go over and re-planting the lot, tidying as you go. But!...the way we carry out the work encourages us to be delicate and handle the situations with finesse. It’s OK to take your time. Why make it easy when you can make it interesting and complicated. I imagine this way of working as the horticultural equivalent to the way romans trained with wooden swords twice the weight of their metal counterparts. It encourages you to be more agile in the future work, able to deal and manage situations with more finesse and detail. For me, it becomes a game, making sure I execute all the necessary steps in order to essentially make it look like it’s happened very naturally, without intervention. The area Will and I worked on was a small sliver that ran from the front of the boarder to the back under the pollarded *Salix*. In the space were *Lunaria annua* and *Papaver commutatum* which had gone over and were beginning to brown along with their seed heads ripening, as this happens, the peduncle (flower stem) firms up, browning as well. When there are many of these together the image becomes quite noisy. These ran the course of the sliver but only the front 2/3 was going over. The remaining third still had some life in it. Our next step, once clear, was to decide what was going to fill the gap. On looking at the stock we made a pitch of; *Aster tartaricus*, a beautiful, large rosette aster, but probably too large and there was already *A. x frikartii* ‘Monch’, a smaller, larger flowered variety. *Monarda* ‘Leading Lady Lilac’, a bit short, not strong enough for the Long Boarder front edge and the season is a little short. *Tagetes cinnabar*, a great plant but it isn’t urgent in the pot and can hold for a few weeks yet before planting out. *Salvia* ‘Phyllis Fancy’, too tall, 4-5ft. *Salvia leucantha*, too big for a sliver of that size, although a great plant to spill over the edge of a boarder. *Salvia* ‘Amethyst’, early summer flowering, season not long enough. Or, *Aster x frikartii* ‘Monch’, although the “safe bet” it would strengthen the already present

group and make for a much bigger impact in the boarder. This is what we decided in the end as it made the most sense of all the plants we had in terms of their size but also the requirements of the Long Boarder. Over the next couple of weeks these grew rapidly, filling the space very nicely, reminding us that in some cases (particularly perennials) giving space is key for a better impact down the line. As the rest of the material at the back of the sliver began to go over Will and I were put back to work on the space and make those final changes. This consisted of both of us attacking the space from separate sides. One at the back of the boarder and one at the front, delicately tying back the perennial groups and using canes to push back any annuals/self-sowers so that we can get in to do our work without causing too much disturbance. All the remaining poppies and *Lunaria* were removed where they were visible or disrupting the new planting. Others were left to set seed. Through the sliver we had created we planted *Cosmos* 'Double Click Cranberries' which tied in with any earlier plantings of this variety. From here we dotted *Persicaria orientalis* through the empty spaces to add additional height to the space as well as a differing flower form. On stepping back we reassessed our earlier idea for *Salvia leucantha* and its ability to happily spill over the edge of the boarder. We re-shuffled some of the previously planted *Aster x frikartii* 'Monch' to enable us to plant two decent specimens of *S. leucantha*. These would produce good-sized plants that would hide the legs of the *Aster*. It goes to show the importance of assessing and reassessing your plantings. We then re-assessed the whole view and noted the next section to the left that had the same issue with ladybird poppies and honesty going over. These were cleared and planted up with *Rudbeckia hirta* 'Cherry Brandy', a very deep maroon centred Asteraceae, which brightens to a Beaujolais red on the petals. Behind this is a large *Cotinus*, which will make for quite the moody combo. Our last addition to the section was *Agastache* 'Apache Sunset' set between two *Spirea* 'Magic Carpet' to complement and brighten the display with jazzy coral/apricot flowers. So that is the change over. Piece of cake. Almost a complete redesign, but a way for us to extend the season further into the late-summer/autumn and play around with the design aspects of such a display.

This style of clear up is on-going through the garden, reducing the noise, regaining clarity, observing, assessing and making amendments where we see fit. The removal of browns, particularly *Smyrniun perfoliatum* is crucial in cleaning up that picture. From here we look at the next wave, where is the structure and colour going to come from, is there anything to follow? Part of this work was carried out in the area of the Orchard Garden that we call Vietnam. It is much different from other areas of the garden and acts more as an eastern fantasy woodland, with a mix of shapes and structure and smaller elements running through. It is much busier than some of our boarders and as a foliage display has a much longer season, for example, compared to the rest of the orchard garden, which will come into its display in July with a wash of colour. The Vietnam part of the garden is harder to read, where those larger groupings of plants aren't as easily distinguishable. It was previously an area where plants were put in permanently again and again. Now there is very little free space through this section and with the combination of self-sowing elements, it has become even harder to read. When working in the centre the visitors cannot see you, making it a good vantage point to see how they view the space. It is about less than half that interact with the space, walking quickly past those areas that are maybe more challenging or undesirable to them. It is of course more interesting to those who enjoy that style of jungle thicket. There is still a requirement to edit, making space between the larger groups so that it is more readable as a garden. This work, which will be carried out over the winter, will be to remove undesirable plants, consider vistas and remove some of that scrubby element from the planting that makes it difficult to appreciate.

Seed bags have been deployed around the garden on desirable Peony varieties, those being *Paeonia mascula* & *tennifolia*. These are two varieties we have on the lower terrace. *P. mascula* has a medium-large flower in deep rose pink. The flowering season is fairly long on this species (for a peony). The latter is a much smaller variety, with deeply divided foliage, almost resembling something in the carrot family. The flowers are small, vibrant carmine with mustard yellow filaments. The flowers last for a day if pollinated quickly but are a real treat to behold. We are keen to save both seed of these varieties and increase our population of them. The seed can be sown immediately so as to avoid any germination inhibitors setting in before the seeds fully ripen. If that happens then it adds a year onto the already lengthy growth process. The first year they will send out a root, with a shoot growing in the second year. Flowering can take between 5-7 years with the bonus being clean, disease free stock. Not that ours is diseased, but the joy of potentially and patiently creating a flowering plant in that timeframe sings to the pleasures of nurturing a plant.

Along with these seeds, *Fritillaria* seeds can also be collected and sown now with a layer of grit on top and left outside. Again, the secret is patience. Out the front the thatch barn that joins the white barn with the great barn is a small meadow area. In here was a white frit with mauve markings. It is not one I saw anywhere else in the garden and its population remains quite small. The long-term plan is to produce more of these to plant through that whole section of meadow.

Luke, Michael and I were tasked with the replanting of the Lutyens steps now that the display of *Papaver* 'Angels Choir' is going over. The planting to take the place is a mix of cacti, succulents and drought tolerant varieties. These predominantly will come from the cacti house I have been looking after and I am thrilled to get these outside for the remainder of the growing season. Some of the larger, trickier to handle specimens will be sunk in their pots for ease, as well as ensuring if it rains a lot, that their roots are a little more protected from absorbing moisture from the beds. The soil was ideal, very gritty and free draining, but we did add some compost so that those that were out of their pots are able to get their teeth into a good source of food for the duration of the growing season. The planting is the same as with the pot displays. Everything must be significant, with considerations to shape, structure and habit. The space is cleared and the canvas is blank. It must look natural as though its been well established there. Although, unlike other plantings and pot displays in the garden, we are to leave space between the plants, with no self sown elements of annuals to tie it together. With the selection of plants we had in our arsenal, if they were too close together, or tied together with other plants, then the display would become noisy, and the interest of each plant would be lost. Its been good for us to challenge ourselves like this, creating a space that has a different feel to it, showcasing a selection of plants in a different style. There are positives in the negative space. Some of the plants that went in the display were: *Agave parryi*, *Euphorbia ingens*, *Euphorbia milii*, *Agave americana* 'Mediopicta Alba', *Agave americana* 'Variegata', *Aloe striatula*, *Opuntia spp*, *Crasula spp*, *Echinocactus grusonii* and one of my favourites *Yucca filifera*. It is a static display, statuesque and bold. Interestingly it doesn't look out of place against the 15th century medieval house. It looks as wacky and interesting as the rest of the garden.

Rob Leonard Flack.